History Bookshelves

A PORT AND A PILGRIM

BY

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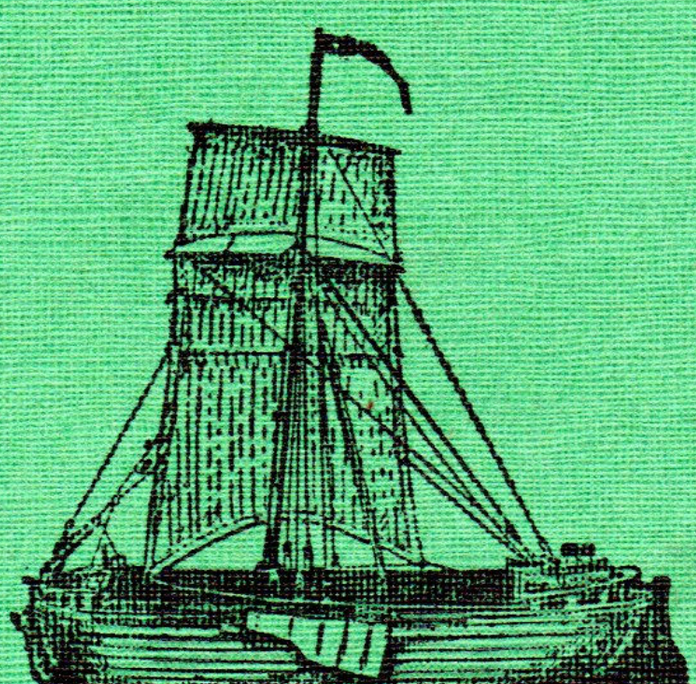

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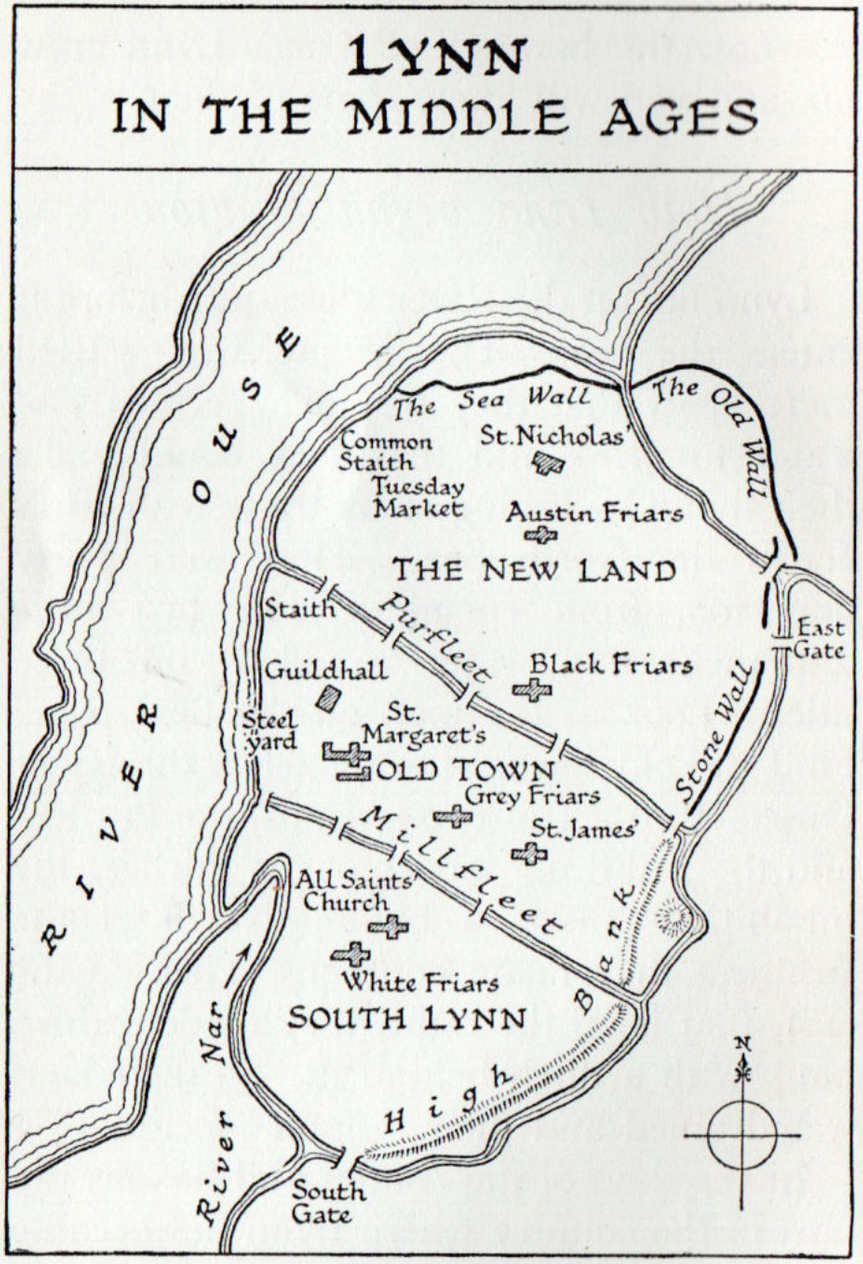
Why do towns and cities grow up where they do? There are all kinds of reasons. See how the borough of King's Lynn grew up, and you will know some of them.

How Lynn began to grow

Lynn lies on the River Ouse, just before it enters the sea. The people who settled there knew that they would have plenty of water to drink and that they could make their living by fishing or by trade with lands across the North Sea. They were fairly safe, too, from enemies. The first little settlement had water round it on three sides. Look at the map on the next page. Find the old town. On the left is the River Ouse. Into it run two streams, the Purfleet and the Millfleet. South of the Purfleet the inhabitants made a bank. North of the Millfleet they made another. Then to the east, that is on the right, they made a third bank with a ditch behind it. So their land was drained and their 'island' secure.

In the days of the Angles and Saxons the part of the country where Lynn lies became known as East Anglia, and the bishop of East Anglia became its lord. When the



Normans conquered England this land was again granted by the king to the bishops of East Anglia. (These bishops became known as bishops of Norwich.) One of these bishops, whose name was Herbert de Lozinga, was interested in building churches and monasteries. He built a cathedral at Norwich and made a monastery there. He also began in the year 1101 to build a new church at Lynn, quite near to the water-side. The church became known as St. Margaret's. Monks from Norwich were sent to serve God in this church. They needed a home, so monastic buildings were made on the south side of the church. The monks were Benedictines. *English Monasteries* tells how they lived. The monk who was put in charge of St. Margaret's was called the prior.

Lynn began to grow. People were building houses on part of the sandy marshland to the north of the town. Another bishop decided to enclose it. He banked up a wall to the north to keep out the sea. Then he strengthened an old wall to the east. In his New Land he built a church which was called the Chapel of St. Nicholas. Monks from Norwich were sent to serve there, too.

The town still grew. Already there was a market on Saturdays outside St. Margaret's church in the old town. Before long there was a market on Tuesdays in the New Land. Later, a third piece of land, South Lynn, began to be occupied. Like the New Land it was joined to the Old Town by bridges, shown on the map. But part of South Lynn was meadowland for a long time to come.

A charter from the king

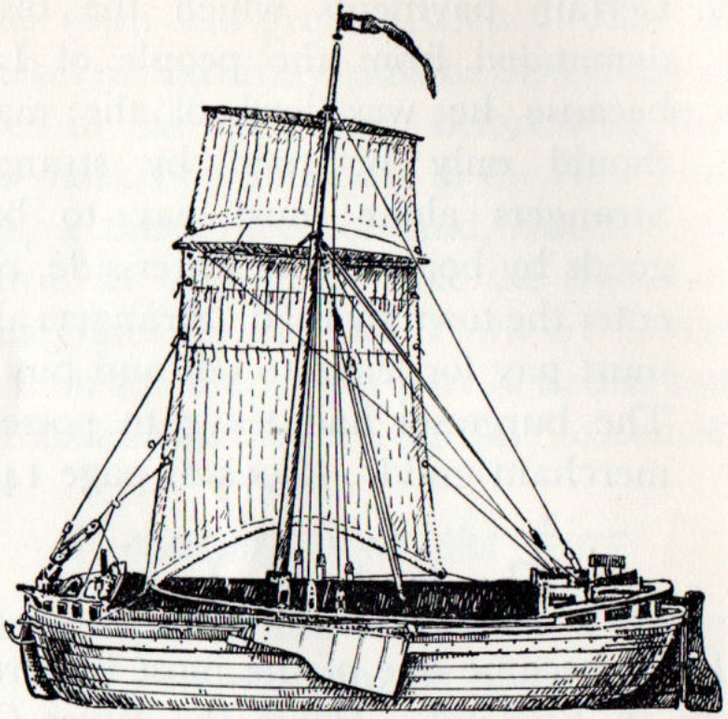
The merchants and other men of Bishop's Lynn (for that was now its name) liked to manage things for themselves. Another bishop, a friend of King John, asked the king if he would grant a charter to Lynn. A charter was a list of the liberties or privileges that the people of a town might have for themselves. Oxford had a charter which people thought was a good one. Lynn was given a charter of the same kind. Here are some of the liberties promised to the burgesses, the townsmen, of the borough of Lynn:

1. They might try in their own courts, and punish, people in the borough accused of crimes. These people need no longer be tried in the king's courts.

2. Certain payments which the bishop demanded from the people of Lynn because he was lord of the manor should only be paid by strangers. Strangers alone must pay to bring goods by boat to the water-side, or to enter the town by road. Strangers alone must pay for leave to sell and buy.
3. The burgesses had leave to possess a merchant guild. (Look at page 14.)

The trade of Lynn

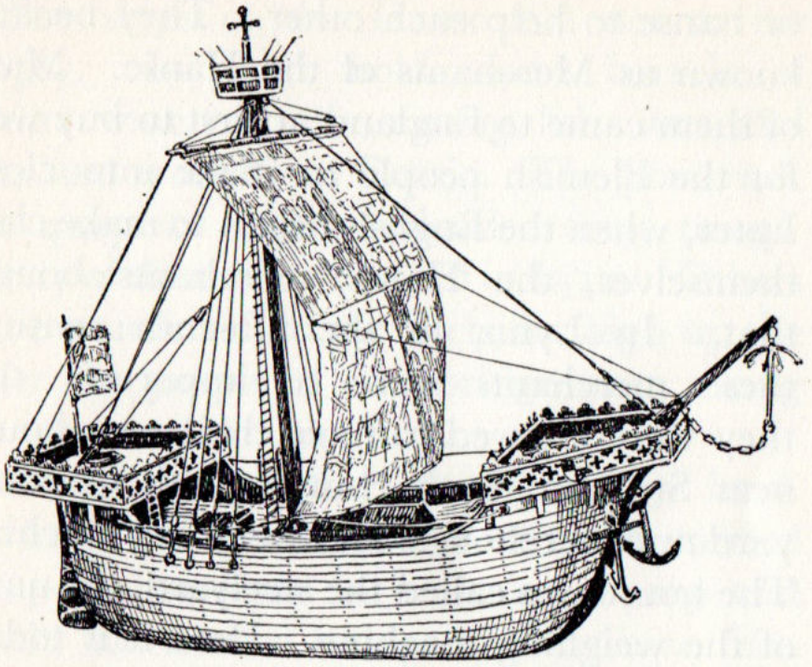
Lynn became one of the most important ports in England. Down the River Ouse came boats carrying cargoes of wheat. Or they might be loaded instead with sacks of wool or packs of sheep skins. Some of the wool, particularly in the thirteenth century, came from the sheep farms of big abbeys. Some might have been bought by foreign merchants at the fair at Stourbridge, near Cambridge. Some in later days might have been bought from small farmers by the 'woolmen' of Lynn. Many of the boats which carried cargoes of wheat or wool were keels, flat-bottomed boats with a single sail, like that on page 6.



A keel used today

Other boats arrived at Lynn from the sea. Many of these were cogs. A cog was a cargo boat, wide and deep and blunt at both ends. Cogs might be quite small and with a single mast, but by the end of the fifteenth century some were three-masted ships.

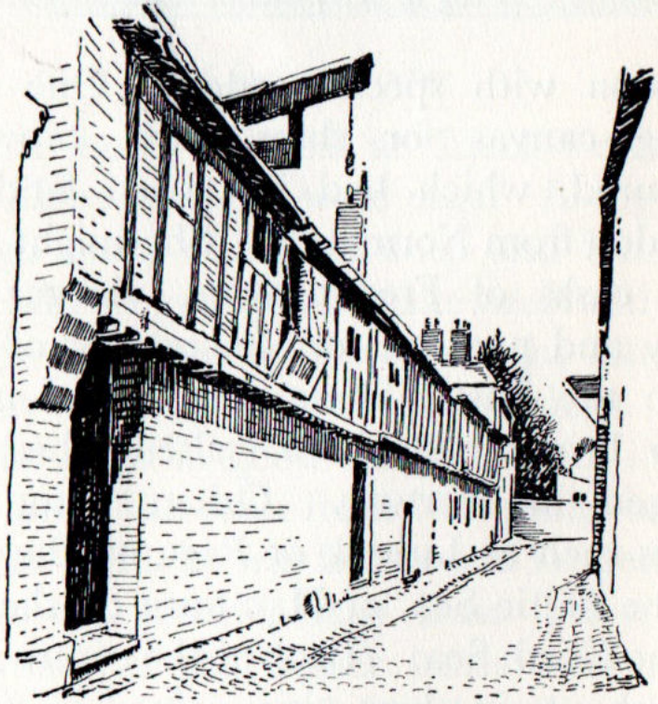
Some ships in good weather came southward along the coast from Newcastle, bringing coal. (There was little wood for people's fires in the wide, marshy Ouse valley, and the woods of the higher lands were more and more used up.) Other ships came from



A cog of the fifteenth century

London with special orders. One might bring canvas for ships' sails, brown or coloured, which had just been landed in London from Normandy. She might carry, too, casks of French wine, vinegar from Italy and packages of almonds, or of spices from the East. Some ships sailed up the river bringing stockfish (salted fishes) from Bergen in Norway. Others came from cities such as Lübeck or Riga on the shores of the Baltic Sea, or Hamburg on the shore of the North Sea. (Look at the centre page.) Merchants in these cities joined in a guild

or hanse to help each other. They became known as Merchants of the Hanse. Many of them came to England at first to buy wool for the Flemish people to make into cloth. Later, when the English began to make cloth themselves, the Hanse merchants bought that. In Lynn, in the fifteenth century, these merchants were so important that they were allowed to have their own house, near St. Margaret's church, with its court-yard and warehouses and weighing machine. The house was called the steelyard, the name of the weighing machine. Here it is today.



The ships of the Hanse did not arrive empty. In their holds were barrels of Rhine wine, salt for curing fish, furs and wax and wood from Russia. The porters at the quays or staiths unloaded these things. Many of them were wanted in Lynn. Others were transferred to the keels, for high up the river the people of Cambridge were asking for wine and salt and furs.

Some goods came to Lynn by land. Sacks of wheat and wool were easily carried by pack-horses or in wagons. Sheep and cattle for market came on their own feet. Lynn had two yearly fairs. Each lasted for a fortnight. King John, who allowed Lynn to govern herself, had also agreed to the fairs.

How the borough was governed

The people who had power to govern the town were the mayor and aldermen. The aldermen made up the 'corporation' or town council. These men had many things to think about. They had to see that the walls and banks and the ditches of the city were kept in good order. They had to repair the sluices or water-gates which prevented salt water getting back into the

streams and ditches when the tide was high. They had to provide firehooks and ladders to use in case of fires. In 1338 they spent a big sum on a new pavement for the common market. On other occasions they ordered posts to be put up to prevent horses entering footpaths. Here is one bill:

12d. for a tree and placing the same at the Gannock gate to prevent the passage of horses.

When people broke the laws, the mayor had special members of the corporation to help him to deal with them. There were strict rules about the price of bread. Bakers who cheated and sold loaves of under the proper weight were fined. In 1298 Richard Bonde sold a loaf of the best bread for a farthing and the loaf was under weight. He was fined 8s. The same year William Crowe sold a loaf of ' bread of all corn ' (poor man's bread) for a farthing and the loaf was underweight. He was fined 20s. 10d. A penny at that time was worth nearly twenty times as much as it is today.

People who behaved badly in other ways might find themselves in front of the mayor and steward, too. In 1334 Margaret Roke was fined 6d. for breaking in on Clara Milkwuman, and Geoffrey Fuket 12d. for

selling diseased meat. In 1435 this is what is said of Robert Burmond (fined 3s. 4d.):

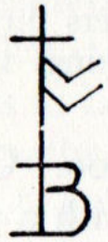
Robert Burmond, of Gaywode, sits outside alehouses all day, and by night wanders through the town with a great staff, making many assaults.

There were other punishments, too. Once there was a question what to do with a man who, out of sheer nastiness it was thought, let sea-water back into the town ditch. It was decided to put him in the pillory and then to turn him out of the town. At another time it was decided that if a man was found ' fraying '—making a nuisance of himself—he must be put in the stocks at the Tuesday market until the mayor said what was to be done with him.

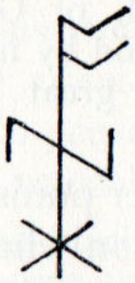
The mayor and aldermen had duties not only to the town but to the king. They had to collect the taxes which the king demanded whenever there was a special need. Sometimes a man refused to pay all he was asked. Then special officers were sent to take away some of his goods. When King Edward I wanted money for war with Scotland in 1298 some men refused to give it. One had his super-tunic, his best overcoat, removed. Two others lost between them four pairs of

Some Merchants' Marks

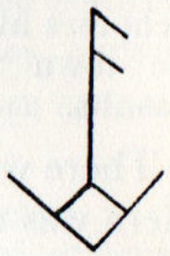
Servants who could not read knew their master's goods from his mark.



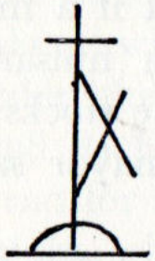
Robert de Burnham of Fuller Row, 1407



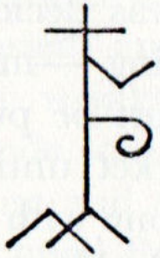
John Brandon of Skinners' Row, 1409



Peter Brown, Webster, of St James', 1391



Nicholas Barbour of Mercer Row, 1421



William Burmond, Cordwainer, of Fincham St., 1446

Thomas Andrews, Roper, of Stongate, 1467

A webster was a weaver; a fuller washed and thickened new cloth; a mercer sold cloth; a cordwainer made good leather shoes.

hose, valued at 2s. 8d. a pair. But another man had his tax reduced. He had already lent 10s. to provide ships for Scotland.

In the Middle Ages there was no royal fleet. When the king went to war, big

ELEVENTH CENTURY	William I	1066
	William II	1087
TWELFTH CENTURY	Henry I	1100
	Stephen	1135
	Henry II	1154
	Richard I	1189
	John	1199
THIRTEENTH CENTURY	Henry III	1216
	Edward I	1272
FOURTEENTH CENTURY	Edward II	1307
	Edward III	1327
	Richard II	1377
	Henry IV	1399
FIFTEENTH CENTURY	Henry V	1413
	Henry VI	1422
	Edward IV	1461
	Edward V	1483
	Richard III	1483
	Henry VII	1485

English kings in the Middle Ages

ports like London and Yarmouth and Lynn were simply ordered to produce ships for the king's use. When Edward III went to war with France in 1337 the men of Lynn provided him at first with three ships, the *Cog John*, the *St. Mary Cog* and the *Katherine*, and paid the wages of the men on board. Afterwards they added other ships. The *Katherine* was a big ship with

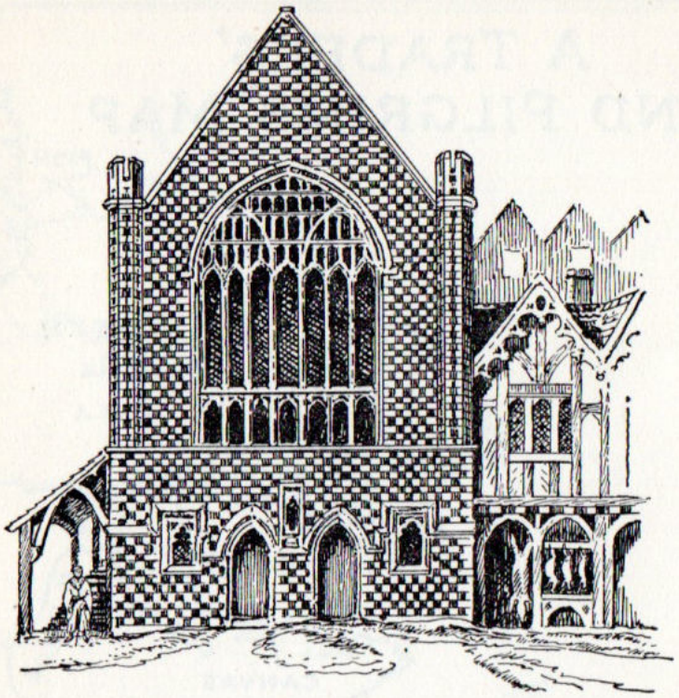
sixty men on board. Most of the other ships had no more than thirty-six hands.

Money also had to be spent on entertaining important people, or in sending presents to them. Often the present was of wine. A king's gift might be of sturgeon, still a royal fish. Once 42s. was spent on herons for the Duke of Lancaster. The marshes near the town were wonderful places for birds. In 1410, when the Lord Chancellor dined with the mayor, swans, curlews, a pheasant, woodcocks, plovers, ducks and geese were all served at dinner—besides many other things.

The Merchant Guild

When the mayor and his council were short of money, they often borrowed from the merchant guild. In the years 1417 and 1418 the guild loaned the corporation more than £68 to pay for entertaining King Henry V when he visited the town. Part of the money was used to provide sixteen minstrels to play at the feast. (Look at *Life in a Manor House*, centre page.)

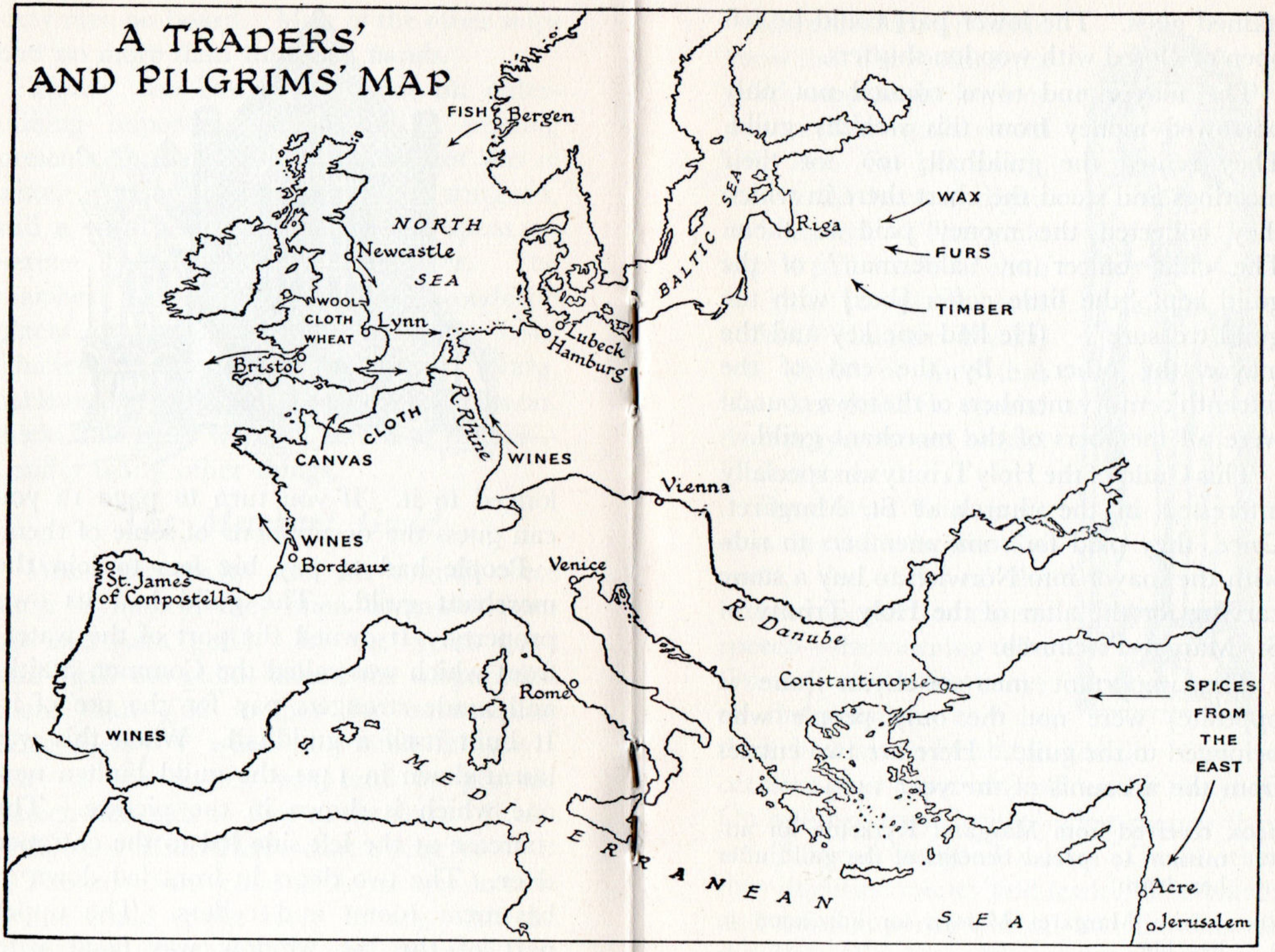
The merchant guild of Lynn was known as the Guild of the Holy Trinity. All the important merchants of the borough be-



longed to it. If you turn to page 12 you can guess the occupations of some of them.

People had to pay big fees to join the merchant guild. The guild had its own property. It owned the part of the water-front which was called the Common Staith, and made strangers pay for the use of it. It built itself a guildhall. When this was burnt down in 1421 the guild built a new one which is shown in the picture. The staircase at the left side led to the entrance door. The two doors in front led down to basement rooms and cellars. The upper part of the big window was filled with

A TRADERS' AND PILGRIMS' MAP



stained glass. The lower part could be left open or closed with wooden shutters.

The mayor and town council not only borrowed money from this wealthy guild. They rented the guildhall, too, for their meetings and stood the chest there in which they collected the money paid to them. The chief officer or 'alderman' of the guild kept 'the little coffer [box] with the guild treasure'. (He had one key and the mayor the other.) By the end of the fifteenth century members of the town council were all members of the merchant guild.

This Guild of the Holy Trinity was specially interested in the church of St. Margaret. Once, they paid for some members to ride with the mayor into Norwich to buy a stone carving for the altar of the Holy Trinity in St. Margaret's church.

The important men of Lynn (one is opposite) were not the only people who belonged to the guild. Here are two entries from the accounts of the year 1409.

100s. received from Margaret Kyrketon for admission to special benefits of the guild after her death.

100s. from Margaret Martyn for admission in her life.

Margaret Martyn would know that if she joined the guild, suppose she became poor or ill, the guild would help her. On her death, she would have a dignified funeral. (The guild kept a pall made of cloth of gold to drape over coffins.) Margaret Kyrketon would be sure that after her death on special days prayers would be said for her soul.

There were four great days in the year for the guild, the days of the 'morowspeche' or morn-speech—the morning talk. On each of the four days all the members met in their best attire in the guildhall. On one occasion they chose new officers for the year. On another they decided what money they would spend on good works. On another they discussed money and trade. The fourth and most important of all was the feast of the Holy Trinity. When the members of

the guild assembled on that great day they saw the bellman standing before them with a parchment roll in his hand. On it were written the names of all the members of the guild. The bellman solemnly read the names of those members who had died. Then the company went in procession through the market-place to the church of St. Margaret. There they joined in a service in memory of the dead ' brothers ' and ' sisters '. Later, in the guildhall, they joined in a great feast. (There were feasts on the other three days, too.) The officers had brought out from the treasure the great silver salt-cellars with silver covers, the silver dishes and cups, and the silver basin and jug used for hand-washing.

Other guilds

There were many other guilds in Lynn, though none so important as the merchant guild of the Trinity. Guilds were made in many places by people who wanted to worship God together, to help people in need, to help their craft or their town. In 1362 thirty-eight guilds in Lynn gave money to build the defences of their borough. A few of these guilds built their own guildhalls.

Most guilds had strict rules about behaviour. Here are some of the rules of the Guild of St. Katherine:

When members are invited to the morn-speech:

1. Each must come or send a good excuse.
2. Each must come in time or pay a penny.
3. If a member ' sit him down and grumble ' he is fined another penny.
4. No one must speak unpleasantly about another brother or sister of the guild.
5. No one must ' defy the alderman with his tongue '.
6. No one must give away guild secrets.
7. No one at the feast must go to sleep.
8. Sick members must have food and drink sent to them.

Some guilds in Lynn, as in other towns, were craft guilds. These were societies of men who carried on the same trade. You can find more about them in History First Series, Book Three, and other books. The great holiday of the craft guilds was the church festival of Corpus Christi.

The friars

The churches to which most of the guilds were attached were parish churches, but

other churches were built by men called friars. The friars looked rather like monks, for they wore long coarse robes with hoods. But monks were supposed to draw away from the world to serve God; friars were supposed to serve God by serving men. They were to be ready to live themselves without shelter or good food. But when bands of friars came to Lynn in Henry III's day, townsmen were glad to provide them with land where they could build churches and houses for themselves—friaries. The map on page 2 shows churches belonging to four orders of friars, Grey Friars, Black Friars, White Friars, Austin Friars.

A pilgrim from Lynn

The friars were great preachers. They often preached in the parish churches. One of the people in Lynn who liked hearing their sermons was a woman called Margery Kempe. (She lived from about 1371 to about 1440.) Another thing she liked to do was to go on pilgrimages.

Some people in Margery's day or earlier went on a pilgrimage as much for a holiday as anything else. The poet Chaucer told

about a fellowship or group of pilgrims who went from Southwark (south of London) to Canterbury. When they reached Canterbury of course they went to the cathedral to the tomb of St. Thomas à Becket. It was covered with plates of gold set with jewels, diamonds and sapphires, rubies and emeralds. They knelt on the steps before it and gave honour to the saint. But these pilgrims went comfortably on horseback and as they went they told each other stories. Margery, till she was old, walked almost all the way (except when she had to cross the sea). She went on pilgrimages to give honour to God.

Margery went to Canterbury and other holy places in England. Often her husband went with her, for it was not safe for a woman to be alone on a country road. One place which she visited was Walsingham. (Look at page 25.) This was not far from Lynn. Many pilgrims came from over the sea to

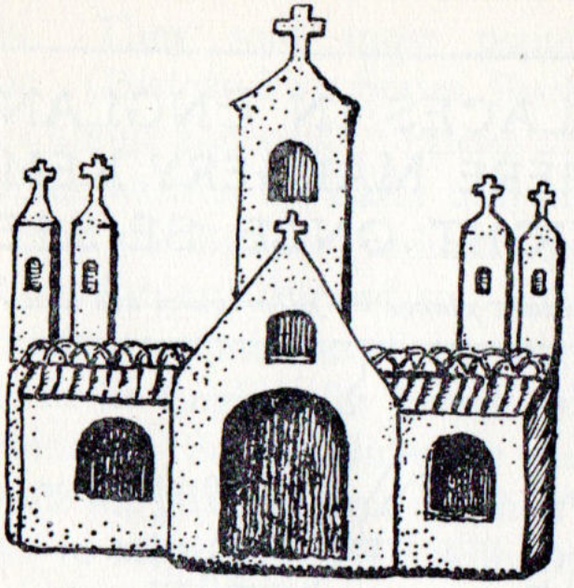
give honour to the Virgin Mary, whose shrine was there. All the same, it was not difficult to get lost in the lanes on the way to Walsingham. This is what the old ballad says:

Gentle herdsman tell to me
Of curtesy I thee pray,
Unto the towne of Walsingham
Which is right and ready way?

Unto the towne of Walsingham
The way is hard for to be gon,
And very crooked are those pathes
For you to find out all alone.

Pilgrims were cheered when they saw a cross which some good person had erected in the fields to mark a pilgrims' way. They would stop to rest there and say their prayers before they went on. Margery tells how once she and her husband, as they were coming away from York 'on Midsummer Eve in right hot weather', knelt under one of these crosses to say their prayers. Afterwards they had a meal together before they went on. There were no sandwiches in those days. They shared a bottle of beer (a usual drink) and a cake.

Margery sometimes got into trouble on her English pilgrimages. In her day churchmen were very suspicious of anyone who



Walsingham Priory—a picture from its seal

A sad song made after the priory was destroyed by Henry VIII

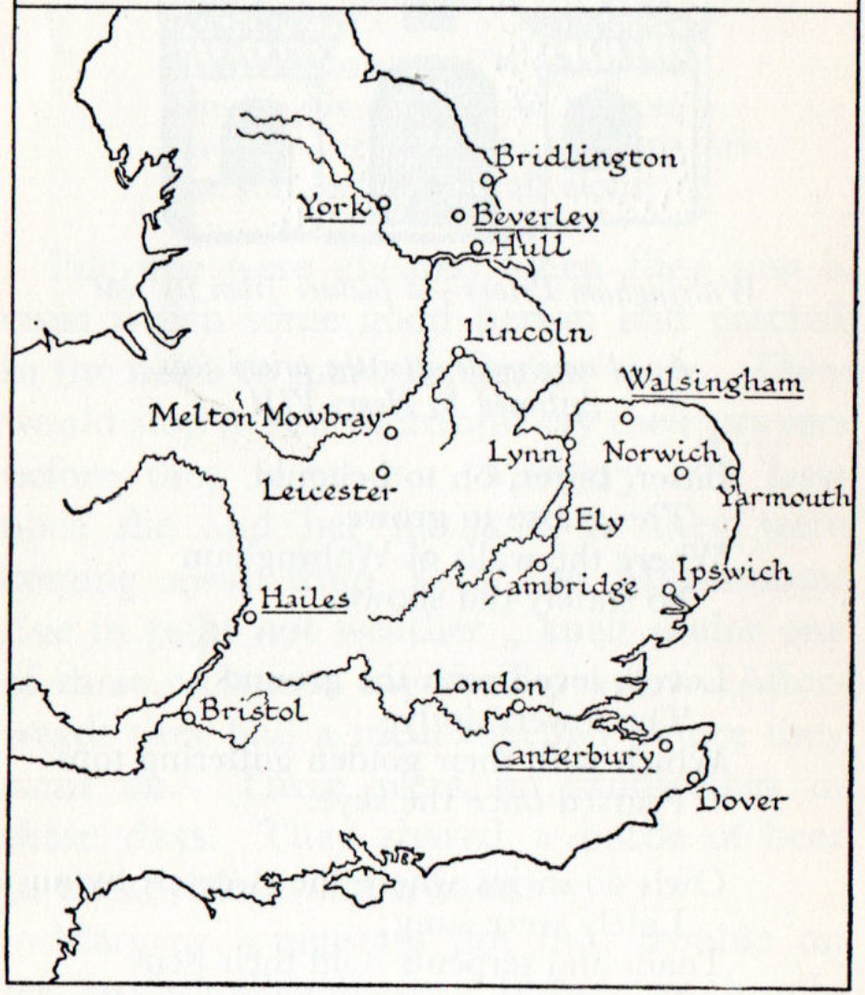
Bitter, bitter, oh to behould
The grasse to growe
Where the walls of Walsingham
So stately did showe.

Levell, levell with the ground
The towers do lye
Which with their golden glittering tops
Pearsed once the skye.

Owls do shriek where the sweetest hymns
Lately were sung;
Toads and serpents hold their dens
Where the palmers (pilgrims) did throng.

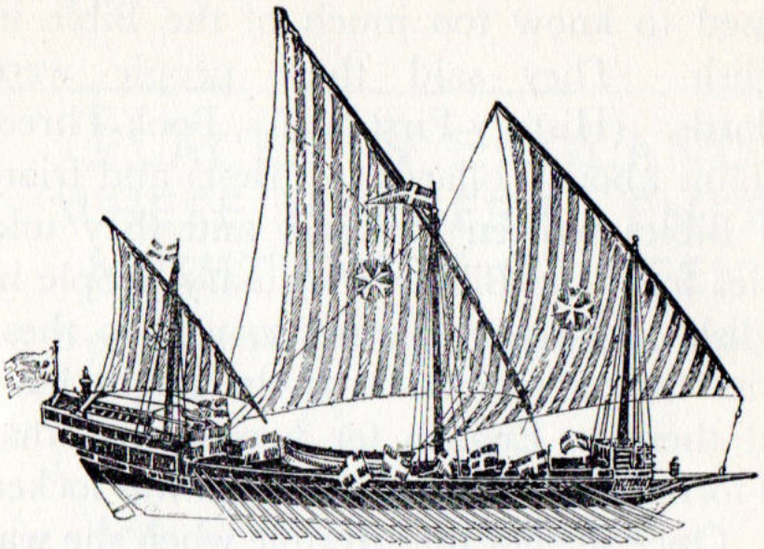
PLACES IN ENGLAND WHERE MARGERY KEMPE MIGHT ONCE BE SEEN

Important places for pilgrimage are underlined



seemed to know too much of the Bible in English. They said these people were Lollards. (History First Series, Book Three, explains about Lollards.) Priests and friars had Bibles written in Latin and they told stories from the Bible to ordinary people in English. Margery listened so well to these stories that it seemed as if she might have read them in English for herself, and that was forbidden. Several times she was locked up. Once she got into trouble when she was at York ' to offer here to St. William '. She was brought before the Archbishop of York. He asked her a great many questions, then gave her his blessing and let her go.

Margery Kempe also thought that God would like her to visit holy places across the sea. Her first long pilgrimage was to the Holy Land. She did not sail from Lynn. She walked first to Norwich where she made an offering to the Holy Trinity. Then she took ship from the big port of Yarmouth, ' and the next day they came to a great town called Zierikzee ' (in Holland). Then with a company of pilgrims she journeyed all across Europe, up the Rhine, across the Alps and down into Italy. At last they came to the sea again at Venice and found a



A Venetian galley

galley which was going to the Holy Land.

At Venice, Margery and her fellowship had to provide themselves with all the things they needed for the voyage. They bought themselves bedding and vessels which would hold their wine, probably small barrels. A pilgrim who had been twice to the Holy Land suggested that pilgrims should have a barrel for water, too. He advised the pilgrims to buy a chest and lock up the drinking water barrel in the chest, with 'yowre bred ches spyses and al other thynges'. Pilgrims, it seems, often stole each other's water. He also suggested that pilgrims should 'by a cage for half a dosen of hennes or chekyn' and a 'lytyl cawdren

and fryyng pan, dysches, platterrys, sawserrys of the cuppys of glas, a grater for brede and such nessaries'. Margery does not say that she bought any of these things.

When Margery reached Palestine, she rode on a donkey up to Jerusalem. Afterwards, one of the friars who lived in Jerusalem led the pilgrims in a procession to other holy places, holding up a cross as they went. Later, Margery went to Bethlehem, again on a donkey. There she visited the church which was built over the place where, it was believed, Jesus was born. On another day she journeyed down the steep desert road to the River Jordan.

When she came to the Flood of Jordan, the weather was so hot that she thought her feet would have burnt for the heat she felt.

Afterwards, Margery went to the mountain where Jesus was tempted,

and there she prayed her fellowship to help her up onto the mount. And they said 'Nay', for they could not well help themselves. Then had she great sorrow, because she might not come on the hill.

The story ends happily, for a local inhabitant came along. She gave him a groat and he gave her his arm 'up onto the high Mount, where our Lord fasted forty days'.

A lady lands with her luggage

On her way home from Palestine, Margery believed that God wanted her to go to Rome. She asked a hunch-backed man if he would go with her to keep her safe. He said that her companions from England had bows and arrows with which they could

defend her and themselves, but he had only a cloak full of holes. However, they started out and soon joined another party, two friars and a woman with a donkey.

Margery spent a winter in Rome. She visited all the great churches. She gave away all her money and only lived on what charitable people gave her—sometimes a hamper of food from the table. Then, when Easter was past, she joined a company of pilgrims on the journey back to England. In the end in a little smack they sailed ' through great tempests and dark weather ' and found themselves at Yarmouth again.

Then had [she] neither penny nor halfpenny in her purse. And so they happened to meet with other pilgrims, who gave her three halfpennies inasmuch as she . . . told them good tales. Then was she right glad and merry, for she had some money which she might offer in the worship of the Trinity when she came to Norwich.

Margery had other adventures. Once she went to Bristol to find a ship which would take her to Spain to the famous shrine of St. James. Men of Bristol helped her with money and she promised to pray for them at the shrine. A ship which

sailed ' with fair wind and weather ' brought her to St. James' on the seventh day.

Not all pilgrims had such good fortune. See if you can make out this song:

Men may leve alle gamys
That saylen to seynt Jamys!
Ffor many a man hit gramys [grieves]
When they begin to sayle!
Ffor when they have taken the see,
At Sandwyche or at Wynchylsee,
At Brystow, or where that hit be,
Theyr hertes begyn to fayle.

Now the master of the ship gives orders:

' Hale the bowllyne! Now vere the shete!
Cooke, make ready anoon our mete,
Our pilgrims have no lust to eat,
I pray God yeve [give] hem rest! '

Many pilgrims suffered from sea sickness. Margery Kempe was sure that God helped her to be a good sailor, but she did not like sea voyages. Often pilgrims like herself were camped on the open deck in cold and wind and rain. A few pilgrims, though, travelled in great comfort. More than once Margery on her journeys met a rich lady travelling with many servants. The picture on page 30 shows one lady landing with her servants in France. But other pilgrims were far poorer than Margery Kempe.

Things to do

1. Make a map of an imaginary town. Name the important places in it.
2. Invent a mark which you can put on things which you make yourself.
3. Make a collection of pictures of the different kinds of bird which you see in your neighbourhood.
4. Find out if there are any special reasons for the names of streets in your own town or district.
5. Make a set of rules for a guild of schoolboys and girls.
6. Pretend you and a friend are going on a pilgrimage on foot. Make a list of the things you will need for the journey.

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